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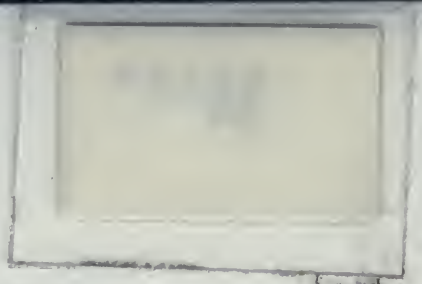
IORE *and* TILE

Edwin Bateman Morris



The MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE and TILE

Edwin Bateman Morris

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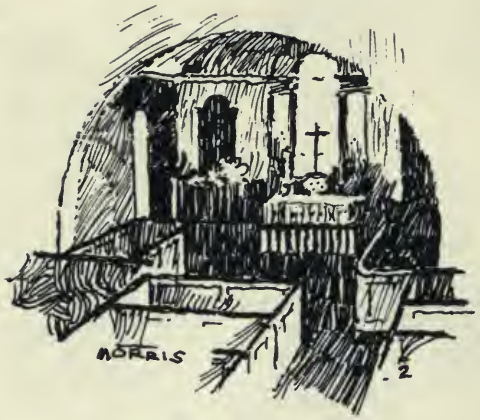

Wye Church

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The MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

Had you or I, by stretch of imagination, been writing a column in the year 1690 or 1700 dealing with trends and possibilities, we would probably have asserted in ten or twelve point type that every thinking American would agree that the civilization of the Colonial seaboard would center around that Mediterranean of the West, Chesapeake Bay; and that new counterparts of Athens, Rome and Genoa would arise there to control the intellectual and commercial development of the new land.

In fact, at this period there came into being the seaport of Oxford, on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, a flourishing center of

M835970

Dan Bridge
Wye Church
EASTERN BAY
CHESAPEAKE BAY
Wye River
Wye House
Pleasant Valley
Myrtle Grove
Miles River
EASTON
Friends' Meeting
Harris Creek
Broad Creek
Otwell
Oxford
CHOPTANK RIVER
Map of
EASTERN SHORE
Vicinity of
EASTON
MARYLAND

maritime trade, holding firm grasp on the rich and growing commerce of the New World. On a certain occasion a light-minded humorist is reputed one day to have said, with what all his hearers knew at once to be an outrageous effort to build up a joke, "We fellows here in Oxford better watch out. First thing you know this town of New York will become a more important seaport than Oxford", this burlesque drawing forth and meriting long and loud guffaws of laughter because of its comic incredibility.

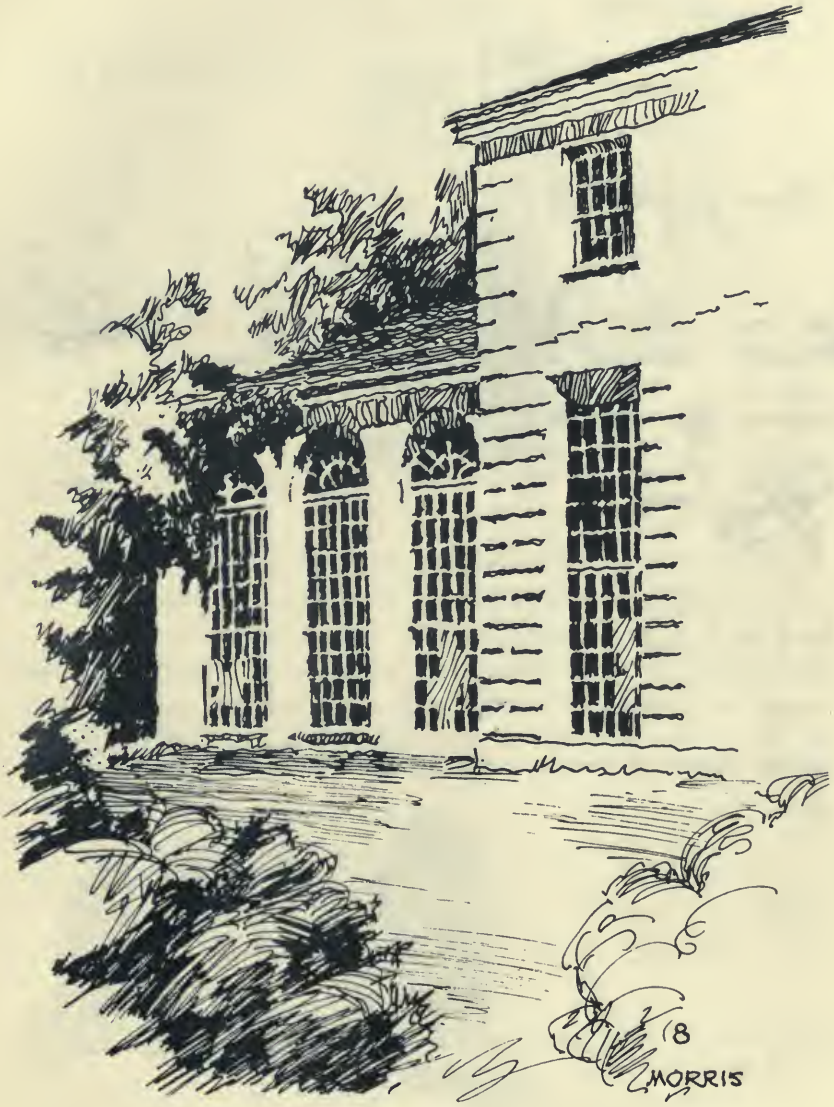
Thus the Eastern Shore (properly, perhaps, pronounced Eastern Sho'), a climate paradise, with long penetrating fingers of the Bay extending inward to form frequent fine water highways, became a center of culture and development which even the once-disbelieved transfer of sea trade to Boston, New York and Philadelphia failed to abate or tarnish.

This level land, boasting recurring views of water, stretches of woodland, fields fertile and nearly always green, was a good place to live. Water-bordered sites were a temptation and a satisfaction to prospective builders; and houses when built became hospitably and spectacularly visible from the network of bays and rivers.

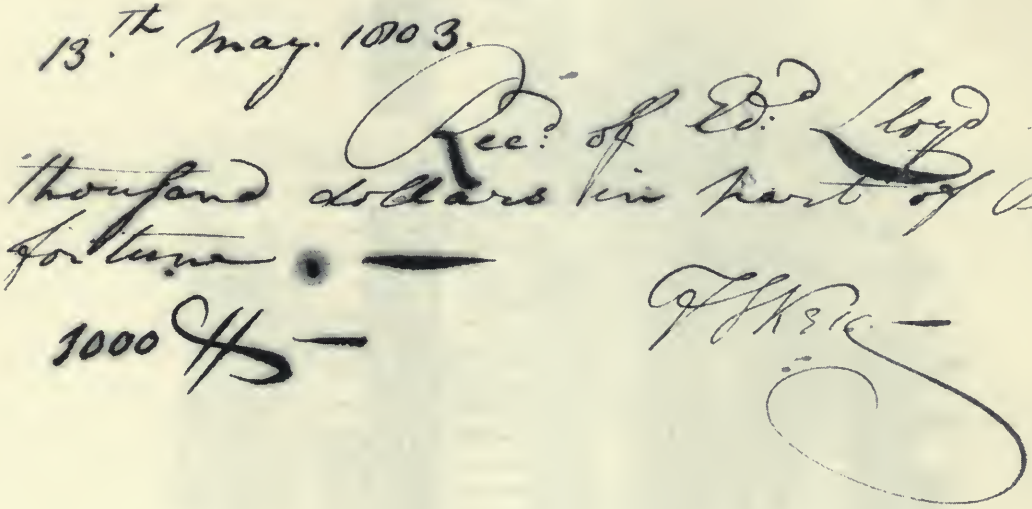
Recently someone has spoken of the community as the Station Wagon Venice, where originally it was convenient to make use of water communication; but now it has become, paradoxically, easier to roll seven or ten miles on tires than to go half a mile by outboard. The remarkable water communication system provided by Nature is shown on the map. It would seem that such an astounding land and water arrangement could only have been the result of some extensive C.C.C. project to teach the young mind the use of the marine dredge.

One of the very satisfactory locations on one of these fingers of water is the site of Wye House. In early days access seems to have been almost exclusively by water, though now macadam and gravel have superceded the more picturesque and romantic dancing wave. The house has been inhabited for two centuries by the Lloyd family and in the house are many distinctive mementos of that long

Wye House



Orangery at Wye House



Receipt Signed by Francis Scott Key for Payment on Marriage Portion

Clock in Hall at Wye House

occupancy. It is now occupied and meticulously maintained by Mr. and Mrs. Morgan B. Schiller, she a lineal Lloyd descendant.

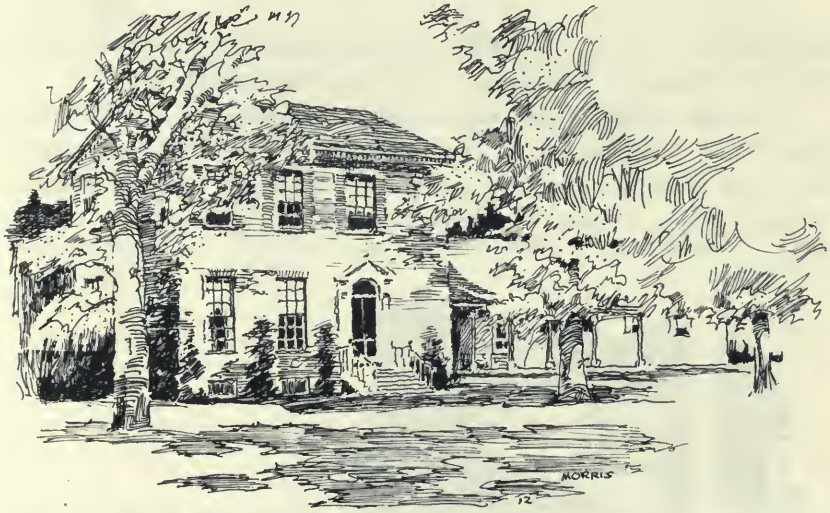
In the matter of the nice and interesting memories of the past, one of the Lloyd ladies in the early 1800's married Francis Scott Key, and there is existing a receipt for part of the marriage portion, signed by Key, which is reproduced on these pages.

Distant View of Myrtle Grove

On the walls hangs a communication from one of the earlier neighboring landed gentry, in his rural environment perhaps more accustomed to homespun than smoother fabric, who was invited to a festivity at Wye House. Thereafter, assumed by someone of the household to have imbibed too much, he was eased out. He wrote the following to his erstwhile hosts:

"Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to wish you health and happiness, with every other blessing the earth can afford, and advise you to bear in mind that we are often deceived in appearance. You mistook me by dress for a country booby, I from the same cause thought these men to be gentlemen. The deception was mutual. I wish you good morning."

There is a beautiful stretch of lawn from the main Wye House to the Orangery. The Orangery, an attractive building, was erected here after one of the Lloyd ladies married a Tayloe, from the Virginia



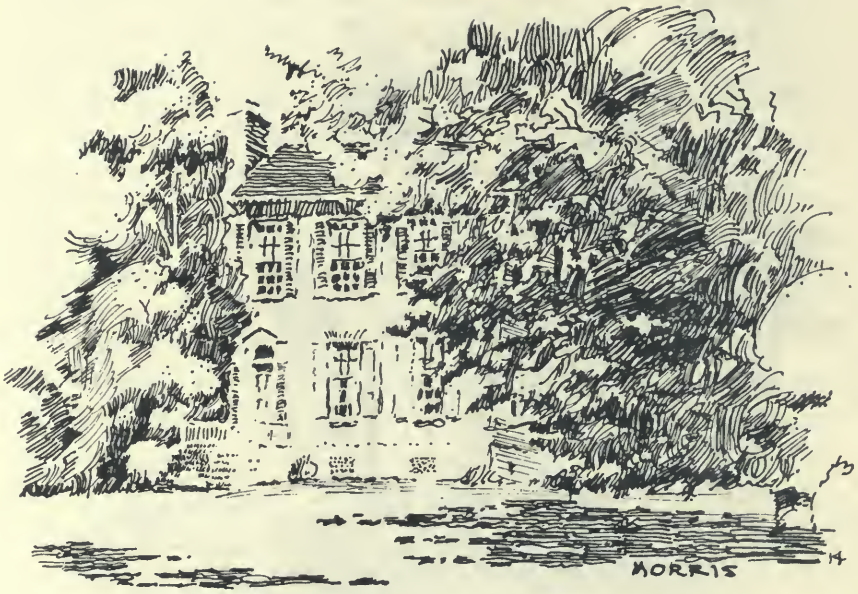
Front of Myrtle Grove

Tayloe family, in the wing of whose historic "Mount Airy" house existed an orangery, which seems to have suggested a similar ar-

Old Wing
of Myrtle Grove

rangement at Wye.

Not too far distant from Wye House is Myrtle Grove. Here, in the manner of the Lloyds at Wye House, Goldsboroughs have lived for generations. One can even find a certain resemblance in the portrait of Judge Goldsborough of Colonial times, which hangs in Myrtle Grove entrance hall, to Robert Goldsborough Henry, present owner. I like to think of these nice and companionable Henrys owning this fascinating place.



Rear of
Myrtle Grove

Once there were peacocks moving about, perching on ridges and so on, a lovely bit of pageantry. I have a vivid picture of Henry Saylor stalking one of these gorgeous creatures, his camera with the safety catch off or whatever is done to make the apparatus explode and record at a moment's notice, entreating the beautiful thing to fan out its tail. Unfortunately, there came some months later local foxes, who had no cultivated sense of color composition; and now there are no peacocks.

Otwell. Low Portion Built 1663.

The frame part of the house goes back to before 1735. The brick portion is later. The combination of the two, with changing ridge levels, is appealing. Within is a fine graciousness and beautiful historic furniture. In its setting of old trees, Myrtle Grove is a valued memory.

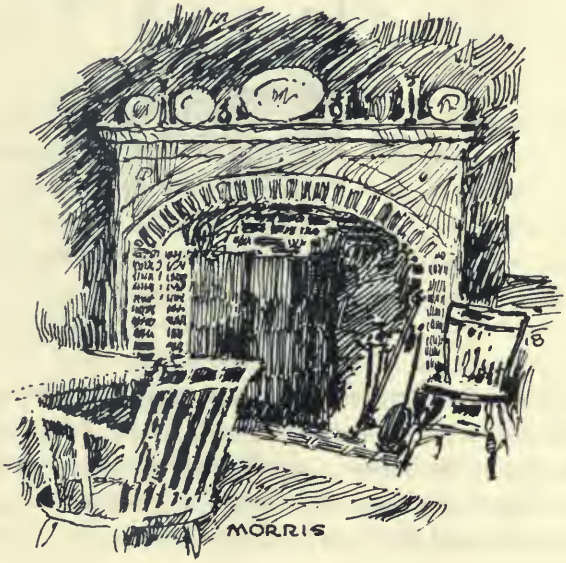
There are a number of houses which were formerly Goldsborough family properties. Ashby, near Myrtle Grove, has a house on the site of one of the very old houses of the vicinity. I find Otwell, originally

Otwell

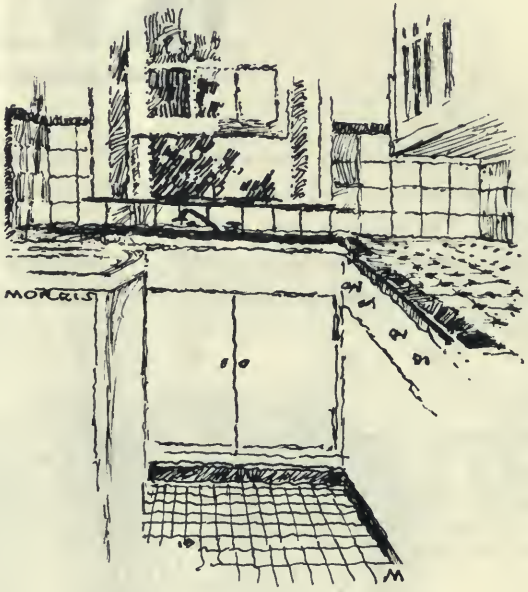
Chimney at Entrance
Side – Otwell

another Goldsborough family house though built at some distance from Myrtle Grove, a soothing and restful place. The wide level lawn runs to water front. The original part of the house was built in the seventeenth century, perhaps as early as 1660. It has been added to from time to time, in trains-of-cars technique, resulting in an unusual and yet pleasant plan.

Dining Room
Otwell



Mr. Andrew Porter, present energetic owner of Otwell, could possibly be said to deserve ownership, by reason of his very evident and earnest enjoyment of the land. He has, with good judgement and



Pantry at Otwell, Showing Tile

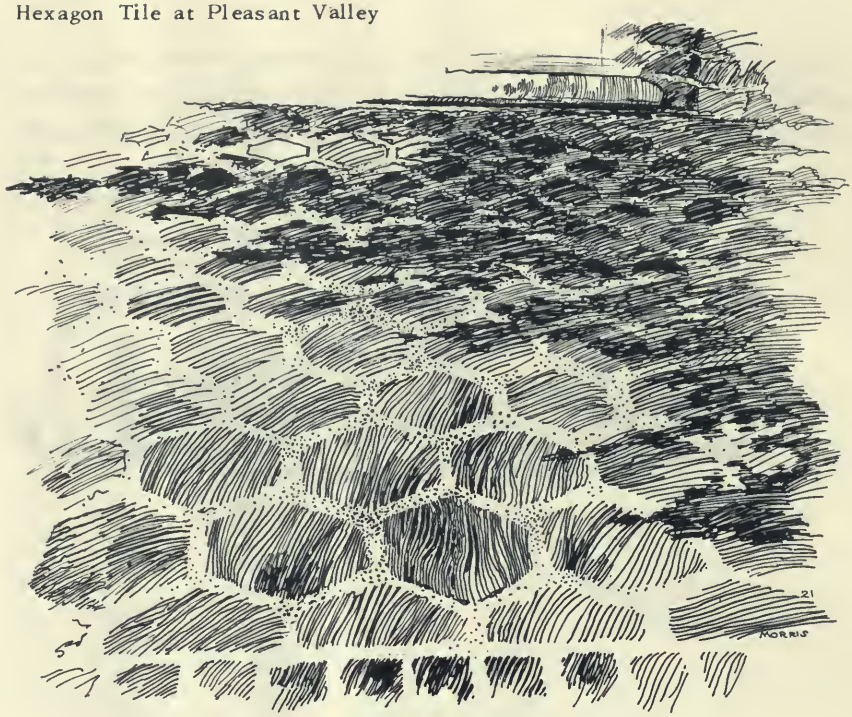
taste, brought modern things to the house: television, tile, book shelves, bar, kitchen- and pantry-perfection. These, sympathetically added, emphasize rather than detract from the ancient sentimental charm. There are dogs and horses; and somehow dogs and horses, like boxwood, add flavor to such a house.

Exterior — Pleasant Valley

I think it could be said that none of the houses have more beautiful surrounding of trees than Pleasant Valley, across the water from Myrtle Grove, yet somewhat distant from it, if travel is by highway. There is a double aisle of trees before the house, meeting overhead to make what seems to be an extensive green-carpeted outdoor room. Within is lovely historic furniture in a sweet and joyous house, dominated by its impressive stairway.

The house dates to 1740, perhaps a few years before that. In the floor of the entrance portico are hexagonal quarry tile, spoken of in early days as thin bricks, but which do have the qualities of tile. They are well-preserved and decorative. I speak of them as hexagonal quarry tile, which is a method of expression possessed of some inaccuracy, since quarry means square and hexagonal does not, so

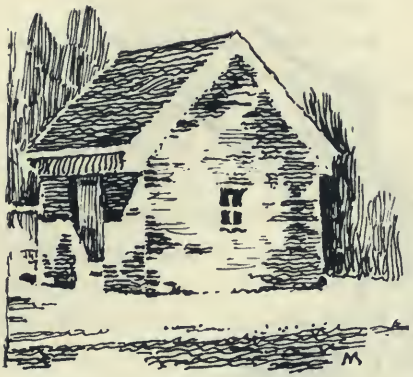
Hexagon Tile at Pleasant Valley



that the appellation carries with it a possible bit of confusion. But these tiles are made from the natural undiluted clay, which is the method of quarry tile manufacture.

One finds the owners of these houses so appropriate to them. They have an appealing affection for the houses, and have taken on some of the serenity of them. One of the colored women of the neighborhood said "The quality folks hereabouts is so common," meaning to say in her groping way perhaps that these decendants of long family lines do not depend upon that but seek to be accomplishing and human on their own.

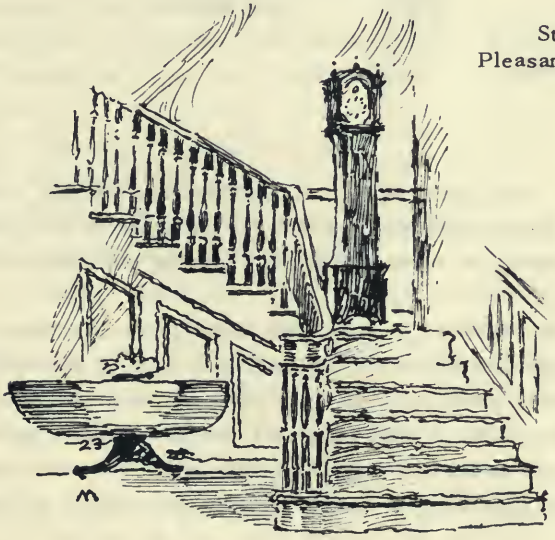
I like the story I heard of a man, not necessarily of long genealogical past, who owned a house of modern origin, if within a hundred years is modern. I observed in this house an eight or ten



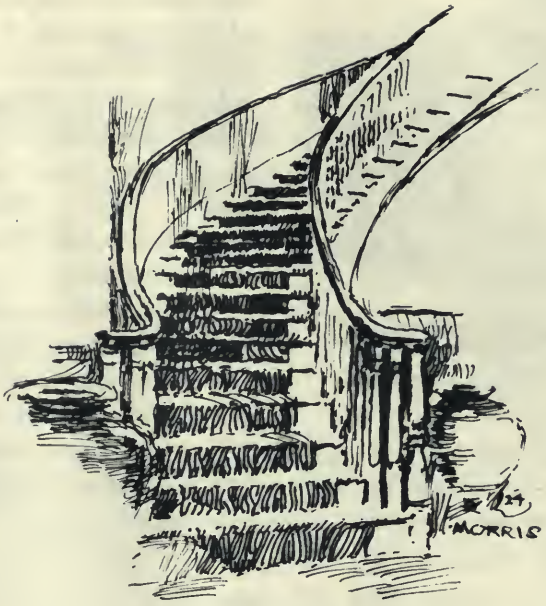
Utility House
Pleasant Valley

inch diameter hole in the ceiling of the living room to lead into the master bedroom above, a hole patched but its outline still clearly showing. It turned out not to have been a flue-hole, but was a device which clearly shows the ingenuity built up by this even climate.

The owner was married to a wife exceedingly cautious and timid by nature. Thus every night when they were ready for bed, she would ask if the husband had properly banked the fire in the stove in the room below and, always dissatisfied with the nature of his reply, would require him to descend in the cold house and check conditions



Stair
Pleasant Valley

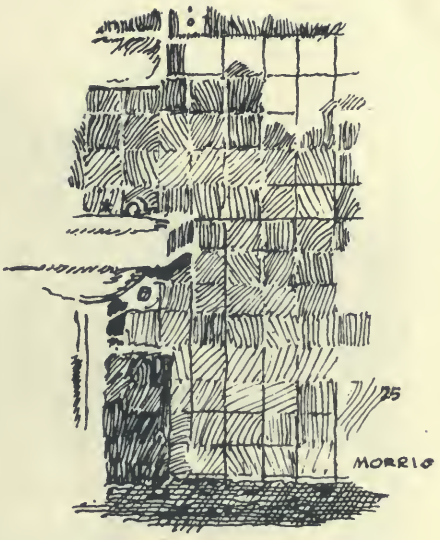


Stair Tidewater Inn

at the source. After years of this nightly rigorous routine, the owner skillfully and ingeniously cut the hole in the floor so he could peer through and report on exact conditions without the difficult safari hitherto required.

When I first used to go to Easton some years ago there existed the old Avon Hotel, a frame pitcher-and-basin type of hostelry which, with considerable good judgement, it seems to me, decided to burn down. From the ashes of this phoenix there has arisen a nice structure, in the brick Colonial tradition, designed by Alfred Hopkins and Associates, and appearing under the alluring stage name of Tidewater Inn.

This is well, even sumptuously arranged and furnished; and has become a center of life in Easton, or at least cafe-society life, if such there be. I do know that it is often customary for Easton brides, to make everything legal, to pose gracefully half way up the red-carpeted curving stair of the hotel for an artless candid shot, and then throw the bouquet.

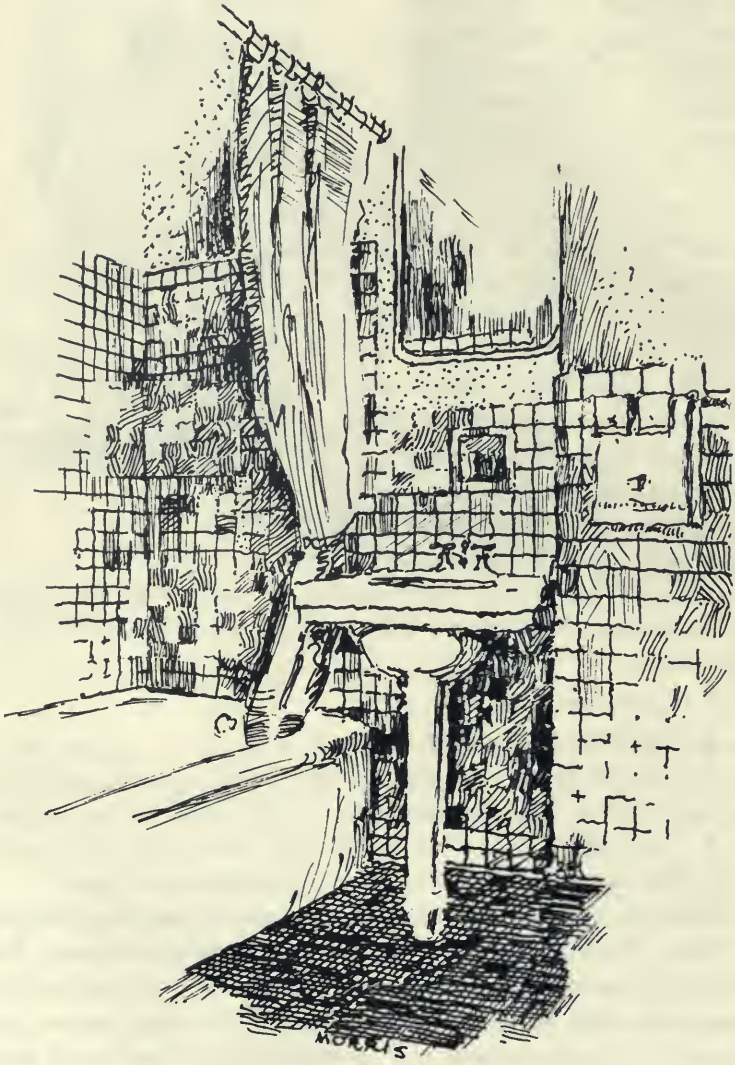


Tidewater Inn

The owners of the hotel, in searching about the locality, found a list of rules and regulations of an ancient tavern, and for purposes of contrast with the air-conditioned, well-plumbed, well-carpeted, well-tiled, well-mattressed Tidewater Inn, placed these regulations where they could be seen. Quaintly, these are the ancient rules:

1. Five pence a night for a bed.
2. Six pence with supper.
3. No more than five to sleep in one bed.
4. No boots to be worn in bed.
5. Organ grinders to sleep in the wash house.
6. No razor grinders or tinkers to be taken in.

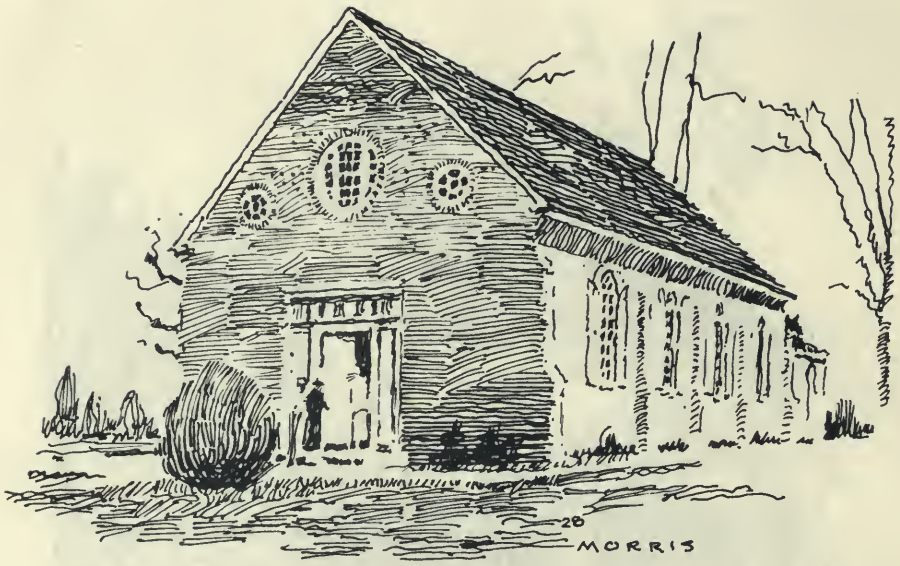
One can feel at once the fine thoughtfulness that prompted the rules. I have long thought, though naturally refraining from expressing myself upon what might prove to be a controversial subject, that more than five persons should not sleep in one bed. And, while I should be greatly concerned for the comfort of organ grinders sleeping in the wash house, yet one can see the disad-



Tidewater Inn

Third Haven Friends' Meeting House at Easton

vantage should an O. G. suffering from insomnia wander up and down the halls, at 2 A.M. let us say, playing on his instrument Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair or She Sleeps, My Lady Sleeps.



Wye Church

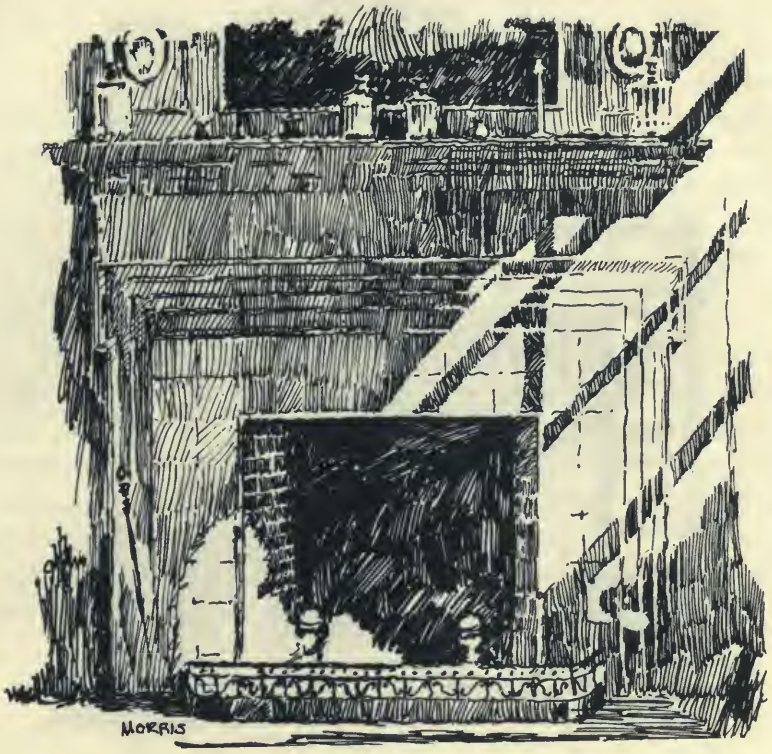
On the outer edge of Easton is the well-known Third Haven Friends' Meeting House. It exhibits a quaint two-slope roof. There are several explanations for the two slopes, the most creditable one being that the roof on one side was spread out to roof an extension to the building. George Fox preached here.

There is now the long bridge that spans the Bay from Annapolis to the Eastern Shore, making this community more accessible, more closely knit to the less serene civilization to the west. There is much enthusiasm for the bridge. One wonders whether some of the serenity may not be wafted away by this contact.

Trees at
Myrtle Grove

Will a person always be able to stand on water shores of the Easton community and, gazing at ancient house, feel himself back in the past? Will he, in imagination, see visiting boats and ladies in powdered hair stepping from boat to wharf, and from wharf to waiting carriage? You reasonably suppose that youth was as stirring and exciting when the scene was approached by rowboat as by top-down convertible. It is conceivable that it was then as interesting an experience to kiss a girl in an orangery with powdered hair in your face as behind a rented palm tree with a permanent in your ear and a print of Come-and-Get-Me lipstick facially commemorating the occasion.

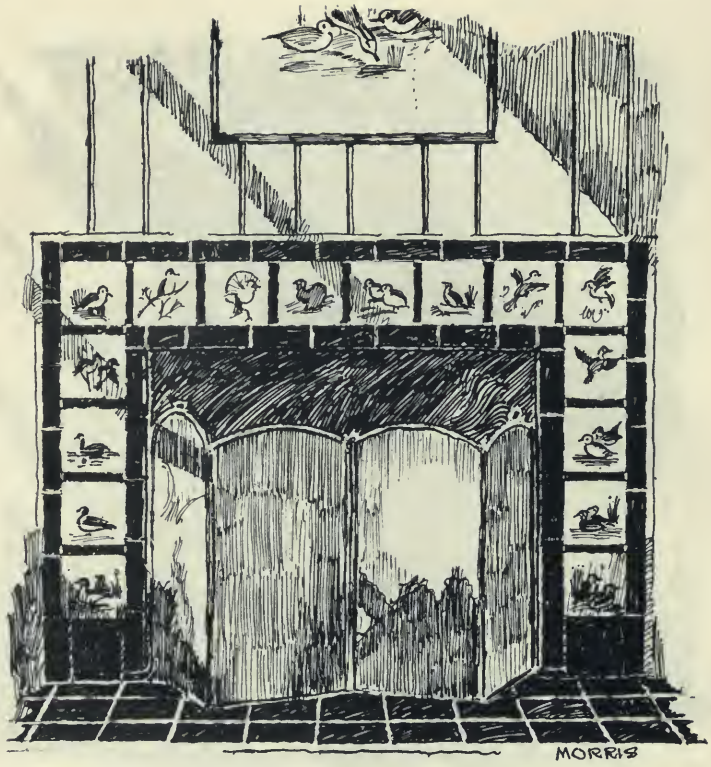
Sixteenth Century Limoge Tile
at Wye Church



Mantle in Wye House

The Wye River, emptying into the waters of the bay, has source at a point some distance inland, giving its name to Wye Mills, to the very ancient Wye Oak, and to Wye Church, recently restored in the Williamsburg manner by Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, through the generosity of Mr. Arthur Haughton.

The Eastern Shore has much of the charm, possibly in a less completely perfect way, that possesses Williamsburg. In both places you experience the feel of earlier times – a soothing poetic mood that builds up, relaxes and makes you less bitter about all the things in the world that makes you bitter. Someone has said earnestly that what with high taxes, high prices, the hammer and sickle threatening,



Mantle in House of F. I. Ferguson, Easton, Maryland. Contemporary tile in Delft Manner. Joseph Wright White, Architect.

the one-platoon system and so on, it is no longer possible to be content. But, when that difficult mood overcomes you, I suggest as antidote, antihistamine, mood pennicilin and so on, a visit to the Easton environs.

I find myself always concerned, affectionately concerned, with the buildings of the past, in gesture toward tradition. Yet as I achieve more years, and mellow frame of mind, I hope, I seem to find the philosophies of the traditional and the modern coming close together – or seeming to.

As I have said, I find the appealing old age of the Otwell house in the Easton area made more appealing, more reasonable, by the addition of grateful modern things. I find in modern houses, where exists comfort from floor heating, picture windows, fire-places made for fires not surrounding carving; there I find evident striving for the same comfort and graciousness as in the past, with new vocabulary – a vocabulary emphasing in its simplicity its success as to color and proportion.

Few persons can actually resist the lure of the perfumed past. In the same breath they are stopped and gripped by the smooth efficient perfection of now. I cherish my valued affection for the old architecture. At the same time I am comforted by the fact that later architecture has the same relation to today's living as had earlier architecture to yesterday's. I convince myself of that by thinking I enjoy my grandchildren with the same firm enthusiasm as in another day I enjoyed my children.

Pleasant Valley

Old Wye Oak,

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